I: Good morning, and thank you very much for taking the time to help me with my bachelor's thesis research paper. I want to start by giving you some legal information regarding data protection. The treatment of all the information collected during this interview is anonymous. The information will be stored under a pseudonym and will be used exclusively for my thesis study. I need you to sign the data consent form within the protocols of the university that I'm serving my bachelor's thesis. This interview has neither any benefit nor risk to you, and you can leave it at any time. I want to ask for your consent to record this conversation as that would make it easier for me to analyze the data later, and I will also be taking some small notes during the conversation. Is that okay with you?

R1: Yes.

I: So, this interview is a study about the perceptions of sustainability in the eyes of consumers, specifically within the food packaging industry. There are no right or wrong answers, so we ask you to be as honest and objective as you can. Again, rest assured that the content of the interview is anonymous and used only for my thesis. Do you have any questions before we start?

R1: No.

I: So, my first question is, how would you personally define sustainability?

R1: I think it's especially related to business, and in this case, like consumer packaging, it's consuming in a way where you reduce if not eliminate waste as much as possible. It's consuming in a way that is conscious of the environment and all the moving parts and pieces that go into the creation and production of what you are using.

I: Okay. And to what extent would you say that you're concerned about environmental issues? Are you taking any actions in your daily routine to contribute to environmental sustainability?

R1: Maybe somewhat. We don't have recycling where I live, so normally, I at least recycle, but I can't do that. Maybe the most basic things like trying not to take an hour-long shower or having a reusable water bottle, but nothing super drastic.

I: Okay. And what do you care about when you buy packaged goods? What do you pay attention to? Is it color, packaging material, any visuals?

R1: I don't know if the packaging necessarily influences me. For example, with food, I don't really care how the packaging looks. I look at the nutrition facts to determine if I'm buying a food product because I'm very health conscious. In terms of non-food related things, obviously, a more aesthetic packaging will draw your eye, but that's not how I make my decision.

I: Okay, so you're more based on the facts and the natural product?

R1: Yeah, especially for food. More than anything, it's about the price. If I have two different options, one with beautiful packaging and the other with the most ugly packaging ever, but the content is the same, I'm going to buy the cheaper thing.

I: Okay. And what kind of packaged goods do you buy? Can you give me some examples of packaged goods you've bought lately, like milk, veggies, frozen food?

R1: Yes, so packaged food, milk, k-cups, packaged meat. My vegetables, normally, I don't use little plastic bags at the grocery store. I just throw them in there. I don't really need the plastic bag to hold it. It's kind of a waste. But mainly, just food stuff like that, that I eat every single week.

I: Okay. And among the products you mentioned, have you noticed if any of them were sustainable products?

R1: I don't think they are. Like, I just buy the Mercadona brand everything because it's the cheapest, but there's nothing that makes it look super green or eco-friendly. I don't think they try to make it look that way.

I: Okay, and how do you assess if a product is environmentally sustainable or green? What criteria would you use to think that a product is sustainable?

R1: I mean, this sounds terrible, but I don't value sustainability when I shop. I'm on a student budget, so I buy the most economically affordable thing. If I really wanted to be sustainable, I guess I would do my research and find zero waste brands and companies. But for the purpose of this question, I don't take any sustainability things into account at this point in my life.

I: So you're saying you don't usually assess if a product is sustainable?

R1: No.

I: Okay, so what elements of a product would make you think something is eco-friendlier than another, regardless of whether you buy it or not?

R1: I think partly the packaging it comes in. For example, if it comes in something that's plastic or something that's 100% recycled or something that's cardboard versus plastic film. The packaging itself and some of the notes like "this box is made of 98% recycled materials" would make me think, "Oh, this is more sustainable" because I would hope the company wouldn't lie about how they manufactured the packaging. But in terms of product-specific, like one milk being more sustainable than another milk, I don't know.

I: So usually, it's the packaging material, you're saying?

R1: Yeah, if it has a note on there like "oh, this was made XYZ way," I would think it was more sustainable.

I: Okay. Now I'm going to show you a series of photos of a variety of packaged goods. Please classify each of them based on what you believe is the most and/or least sustainable, and provide a brief explanation as to why.So I'm gonna make this bigger… okay not that big. Out of these three, which one would you think is the most sustainable?

R1: So, this one is made of plastic. Is this one made of glass?

I: Yeah.

R1: Oh goodness, not the plastic one. Okay, either the metal one or the glass one. Okay, I know plastic is so bad, and everything comes in plastic because it's the cheapest way to do it. So, I know that one's the worst. Um, honestly, I would guess the canned one as the most sustainable, then the glass one, then the plastic one.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1: That's the same thing between glass or aluminum. Honestly, maybe the glass one because most things, like I know, if everything's cost-driven, if it was cheapest to produce stuff in glass, everything would come in glass. Nothing comes in glass. I assume it's the most expensive way to do it. Um, so yeah, plastic one is the third worst, but that kind of contradicts my last answer. Then let's go with aluminum. That's super cheap to produce because a lot of stuff comes like that, and then glass, okay, as most sustainable. So maybe the other one is the same thing.

I: What about this one?

R1: These are all the same but, like, this one might be plastic too. So neither of the ones with the squeeze lid, the least, it's got all the most plastic moving parts, then the little plastic jar, then the glass jar. That's the most sustainable.

I: Okay, and then what about these three?

R1: Oh, these are all the same too. These people Noosa tried to make themselves look so sustainable, but I would literally think I would put them at the bottom because their lid is plastic too. Um, and then Chobani versus Yoplait, I'd say they're the same. Their packaging is like So Noosa last, Chobani, and Yoplait tied for second or first.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1: These are all the same. I would rate them all exactly the same.

I: If you had to pick, which one would you pick if you saw all three in the store? Which one would you probably pick up?

R1: Maybe, well, what I... Well, that's the thing. If I saw these in the store, I'm buying the cheapest one and the one with the lowest calorie count. But I would say for most sustainable, the Simply Orange one because the bottle's plastic design is the simplest.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1: These are all the same too. They're just butter. I have no idea. And I think they're all probably equally sustainable and/or unsustainable just because the packaging, the way it's made, is 100% the same.

I: So you put all of them on the same level?

R1: Yeah.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1: This one looks plastic. It's probably glass, though. It's glass. Oh, then they're like the same thing, like Welch's. Oh, but oh, that's non-GMO. I don't care about that. Hmm, yeah, like this is the same thing. They're all glass. You think because they're all glass, you rate them all... Yeah, in terms of sustainably produced, is it the jelly inside itself that we're talking about? The packaging? Yeah, I think they'd all be the same. Maybe this little tiny one in the middle, Bonne Maman, is less. It's a little smaller jar, but like...

I: What about these three?

R1: Oh, yeah, this is the same thing too. Or like if you saw them in a store, which one would you think was the most sustainable, like the brand?

I: Yeah, if you just saw these three, which one would you assume was the most sustainable?

R1: Um, well, like one of these two Wheat Thins and Triscuit are both by Nabisco. And like Kellogg's is an equally large corporation, so they all suck. Um, if I was going to buy one, I'm buying the Club ones because they taste better, but I haven't... Yeah, I have no idea because it's all like they come in a cardboard box, and inside is in a plastic bag. So it's still all the same.

I: So is there anything about any of the packaging that would attract you more than anything?

R1: Well, I know companies like they'll use like, oh, green, and they'll throw a recycling symbol on there to make you think that it's more sustainable. Um, but like I don't... I feel like if you have a certain IQ level, you know, like just because the box is green and has a plant, that doesn't make it more sustainable.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1: These are the same thing. You see the seventh generation people, they're trying to trick you with the little leaf behind their logo, clean with purpose. Oh, maybe let me read that little zero percent thing. Let's see, oh, no artificial fragrances. This is about the product. Oh, that's so tiny. Make it bigger. If I'm trying to be sustainable, maybe I'd choose the white one, okay, because they've got their little safer choice, that their little things that they like to throw on there to, you know, try to tell you that they're sustainable, that their product is cleaner.

I: Okay, and then what about these three?

R1: I think the one, the yellow lid plastic [Jack's Special], that one's the worst. Um, then maybe the Pace one, then the On The Border salsa is the most sustainable.

I: Okay, what about these three?

R1:I think maybe the Sunbest one's the worst, the Honey Bunches of Oats one second, granola and the cardboard boxes third… or first. First, okay, like, then, you know, sustainability. Yeah, granola Quaker most sustainable, it goes in the same order. The pictures: Quaker, then Honey Bunch of Oats, then Sunbest.

I: And out of these three?

R1: Oh, Fairlife is terrible. They hurt their cows. Um, uh, the one, so let's do Fairlife third, then the Volleman's one second, then the Horizon Organic one. Okay, it's most sustainable.

I: And why? Is that for the material?

R1:Yeah, because it's in a carton versus in a plastic bottle.

I: Okay, and last one is these three.

R1: So, the Califia Farms one, that's a plastic bottle. That one's the worst. Then, carton versus can. Let's do the can second, then the Chameleon Organic Cold Brew Concentrate first.

I: After seeing these photos, I have one follow-up question: Did you perceive any kind of greenwashing from any of the brands that we've reviewed today? In case you're not familiar with greenwashing, it's defined as intentionally misleading or deceiving consumers with false claims about a firm's environmental practice and impact.

R1: Yeah, well, even with the Chameleon one, they put it in green and this and that. The Seventh Generation, they put the leaf on there, like stuff like that tries to make you think like, "Oh, if we're more sustainable, this and that." Almost even stuff like Simply Orange, like obviously when the name came out, they were not thinking in terms of greenwashing. Um, so

maybe a little bit, but none of them were as bad as other ones I've seen, I think. Okay, but you did see that some of them were kind of intentionally using certain marketing tactics.

I: Okay. Well, that is all I have. Thank you so much for your help with my research.